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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, the week to end all weeks, that I mentioned in last week's issue, continued for a few more days. My truck was finally ready to be picked up this past Tuesday. Another day I'd like to forget! The good news is that we made it down and back - dumped the rental car, picked up the trailer and tractor, and limped back home successfully. I really didn't think that the truck would make it, but it did. To add insult to injury, the tractor that initially cost me a few hundred dollars, ended up costing me a couple of thousand, adding in all of the expenses - and it wouldn't start when I got it back home! From now on, no more "great bargains" from my brother!

Well, the weather has finally "improved" this week, if you like instant heat waves! I guess that we can forget about waiting for Spring; Summer has hit us full blast! At least we may have the first completely rain-free weekend since April. Now that would be something nice to behold! MAybe I'll get the last of my mulch down, and the tractor running. It would be nice to be able to mow the lawn while sitting for a change!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. WHO was it who was complaining about summer weather (or the lack thereof) last week?? Nah, it couldn't have been me... I'm too smart to tempt fate in that way.<grin>

Okay, okay. So it WAS me. But I wasn't really complaining, just making an observation. And this week Mother Nature turned around and smacked me right square between the eyes.

True, it's not a major thing. It's not like the local economy is going to be destroyed, it's not like the ecosystem is going to hell, and it's not like the we're going to have to live underground... at least not yet...

but it’s another one of those annoyances that we all learn to live with. I don’t want it to sound like I’m living a place that’s being decimated by drought or plague. Here in the northeast, it’s pretty typical. Unfortunately, ’typical’ means atypical is the norm. If it weren’t for the law of averages, we’d have nothing at all to count upon.

Of course, the fact that I’m preparing for a factory vacation shutdown hasn’t brightened my attitude either. There’s just too much rushing around and too little actual thought and intelligent design involved. Oh well, I guess that I’ll just have to do what we all usually end up doing... living with it and trying to stay out of the path of the mayhem.

This week’s column is going to be on the short side, since I’ve been putting in 12 hour days for the past several weeks and it’s really starting to wear me down. There are only so many hours in a day, and there are only so many of those hours that are available for "leisure pursuits" like this. Yes, this is truly one of my leisure pursuits. I enjoy doing it, and I find that I learn more than I can possibly contribute almost every time I sit down to put this column together. What more could one possibly ask for?

Oh, just in case you haven’t done the math yourself yet, this issue marks this year’s half-way point. 26 issues down, 26 more to go. I don’t know why things like that pop out at me... they just do.

Now let’s get to the news, hints, tips, and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Raoul Teulings asks about a GEMdos error:

"Does somebody know what a gemdos error means and what can be done about it? Recently I get that very often and especially when I get to the menu bar. For instance: saving or loading in Papyrus gives this problem. Has it something to do with running Stewart and Jinnee? Or is there another reason for? Do i have to change some settings?"

Edward Baiz tells Raoul:

"If you are talking about the latest version of Papyrus, I get an error also at times when trying to load it on my Hades. For me I can get it to load if I turn off my caches or do not split my Ram.

If I have my caches turned off, I turn them back on when after Papyrus loads. Of course, all of this happens under Magic. Under Mint or Geneva, things are fine."

Steve Sweet adds:

"I dumped Stewart due it it exploding my system with GEMDOS errors, I believe it jumps into various GEMDOS hooks to intercept the menu bar mechanics."

Greg Goodwin asks for help with an old copy of HD Driver:

"Years ago, I picked up a older copy (even then) of HD Driver from U.S. based Systems For Tomorrow. I used it a few times, and then the disk stopped working. And in truth, so did another Systems Solutions disk, being Cab 2.7.

I was wondering if anyone had a copy of these two that they could send me. (zipped disk image). I still have the manuals, it is just that the disk in both cased went belly up. And at least HD Driver would be nice to work with again as I am trying to rebuild a TT030 at the moment and trying out Ethernet and such."

'Tim' asks about using a PC power supply in an ST:

"Can someone provide some guidance on how to adapt a PC Power Supply to connect to a Atari 520ST? The one with no Disk drive that requires a external PS! I know it needs +12, -12, +5, and -5 and Ground, is that right? Can I just splice up a cable and connect it to the 520? Not really qualified on this type of thing but am willing to try!"

'Smeg' asks Tim:

"Does the 520ST need -12 and -5V? I'm asking cos the 520STFM/E doesn't. If not then its a simple question of using the reds on the PSU for 5, the yellows for 12, and the blacks for 0."

Dave Glish jumps in and tells Tim:

"I'd wager that they don't need the -12 or -5. I know the MegaST doesn't. Our computer club is going to be doing away with a bunch of STs (the type with the external power supply). We could make you a real good deal on a power supply and even an extra ST.

I won't be able to get to the computers until our next meeting though. They are stored at the church where we have our meetings."

Michael Schwingen tells Dave:

"The MegaST has an internal DC/DC converter for the RS232 voltages, the 520ST doesn't (if memory serves me right), so it probably needs the -12V."

Greg Goodwin adds:

"Assuming the PC supply provides sufficient amperage (and I'd suspect it does) it really is just a matter of connecting the proper wires. The PC supply may need the +5V "always on" line connected to a ground line depending on the model, but that's the only real difficulty. Try to find a PC supply with an on/off switch if you can."

Well folks, that's it for this week. See? I told you it was going to be short. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - New Tomb Raider Out This Week!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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New 'Tomb Raider' Game Tweaks Franchise

Lara Croft has finally learned that there's more than one way to raid a tomb.

The sixth and latest "Tomb Raider" video game title, "The Angel of Darkness," hits stores this week. Now fans will decide whether the game's latest innovations have freshened the franchise or alienated players with too many changes.

"For us to take Lara and put her in a racing car, it would have been very simple to do. But that isn't 'Tomb Raider,'" said game co-creator Adrian Smith, operations director of British-based Core Design. "People buy this game with some kind of expectancy of what they're getting."

"Angel," available for PlayStation 2 and PC, features Croft being framed for the murder of a rival. She then tries to simultaneously prove her innocence and stop an evil cult while hiding in catacombs beneath Paris.

Apart from dramatically improving the graphics, which make the bombshell Croft look more lifelike, Croft can now sneak through levels, hiding in the shadows and ducking behind walls, instead of engaging other characters in battle. Of course, you also can still choose to go in with both her signature thigh-strapped guns blazing.

"Angel" also has added more open-ended gameplay. Like a child's "Choose Your Own Adventure" novel, players now can make decisions that lead the story in varying directions, rather than follow traditional linear storytelling.

For the first time, Croft also must interact with non-playable characters, asking for advice on which path to choose. There are multiple ways to solve the game, so players may play again to pick different options. That's not something new to gaming, but it is to "Tomb Raider."

"It adds a little bit of longevity to the game," Smith said. "So people can go back and talk to Pierre rather than talk to the janitor. Both will tell you to go to the same building, but one may give you a key to go one route and the other might tell you to go in the back door."

Some fans playing the game after it debuted Friday praised the new graphics, but had mixed feelings about other changes.

"As the games have progressed there have been more and more confusing commands, more in-game characters and plots to keep up with, and the story lines increasingly lack creativity," said Kelly Johnson, 17, of Columbus, Ga. "The new equipment is nice, but there's just too much of it."

Still, Johnson was optimistic about "Angel": "I'd have to say the alternate ways to finish a level would be the most enticing."

In a "Tomb Raider" chat room, one fan posting under the name "SCJX" described the gameplay as "awesome," but complained that the story started slow: "I feel a little like I'm playing a role-playing game some of the time, though. Running around Paris searching for an address so I can talk to someone, blah, blah, blah. I'm still hoping for some vast tombs and blasting action."

Updating a popular game franchise is a tightrope for many designers. Mess with a format too much and fans revolt, like 1988's "Zelda II: The Adventure of Link," which robbed players of their coveted topdown gameplay in favor of "Super Mario Bros."-style side-scrolling action.

Meanwhile, the same-old, same-old treatment can lead to stagnation. The popular "Megaman" series has spawned more than a dozen sequels since the 1980s, but its following has faded as fans complained that the action never evolved enough from one title to the next.

Some drastic changes work miracles. "Grand Theft Auto 3" is virtually indistinguishable from "Grand Theft Auto 2" - with substantially more detail, closer "camera" angles and extreme depictions of carnage. Still, "GTA3" became wildly more popular than its predecessor.

In the new "Tomb Raider," another important change is not in the player's hands. While the shapely Croft was the only playable character in the previous games, this time a muscular new hero named Kurtis Trent will take the lead later in the story. Croft is relegated to the sidelines.

"People have always wanted a love interest for Lara and while we don't obviously have them shack up, so to speak, there's some sexual tension there," said Paul Baldwin, marketing executive with "Tomb Raider" publisher Eidos Interactive. "There are some cut-scenes when they first meet eyeing each other and some caressing. Kurtis takes her weapons away and goes for a little roller coaster ride down Lara's curved body."

That's a ride, developers think, that fans will be willing to take.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Top Court Upholds Internet Library Filters

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld on Monday a law requiring the nation's public libraries to filter out Internet pornography, ruling it does not violate free-speech rights.

By a 6-3 vote, the justices reversed a ruling by a special three-judge

federal court panel in Philadelphia that the filtering requirement caused libraries to violate the First Amendment constitutional rights of their patrons.

The decision could affect the online choices available to millions of Americans who use Internet-connected computers at public libraries.

The ruling was a defeat for a coalition of libraries, library patrons and Web site operators, led by the American Library Association and the American Civil Liberties Union, which challenged the law as unconstitutional censorship.

The Children's Internet Protection Act, signed into law in 2000, required libraries that receive federal technology subsidies to use content filters to screen out obscenity, child pornography, and sexually explicit material deemed harmful to minors.

The subsidies, which have totaled nearly $1 billion and can make up 90 percent of a library's technology budget, help pay for Internet access, automated catalogs and other services. Companies that make the filters include Websense Inc., N2H2 Inc. and Surfcontrol Plc.

About 143 million Americans use the Internet regularly, and about 10 percent of them go online at public libraries, according to factual findings in the case. Nearly all the nation's libraries provide Internet access.

The decision involved the latest test of efforts by Congress to shield children from online pornography.

The Supreme Court first struck down the Communications Decency Act of 1996. Last year, the court ruled on the Child Online Protection Act of 1998, sending the case back for a decision on unresolved free-speech problems.

Librarians and civil liberties groups said the software filters prevented patrons from finding information about breast cancer, homosexuality and other legitimate subjects, and that the law could change librarians into censors.

The U.S. Justice Department in defending the law replied that libraries are not forced to carry pornographic movies and magazines and should not be forced to make pornography available online.

In a 17-page opinion, Chief Justice William Rehnquist said for the court majority that use of filtering software does not violate the patrons' First Amendment rights, does not induce libraries to violate the Constitution and is a valid exercise of congressional power.

"Especially because public libraries have traditionally excluded pornographic material from their other collections, Congress could reasonably impose a parallel limit on its Internet assistance programs," he wrote.

Justices John Paul Stevens, David Souter and Ruth Bader Ginsburg dissented.

Stevens said the law "operates as blunt nationwide restraint on adult access to an enormous amount of valuable information that individual librarians cannot possibly review."

Denouncing the ruling, the American Library Association said it would ask

filtering companies to reveal what sites are blocked by its software and why they are blocked.

The association said, "The public library is the number one access point for online information for those who do not have Internet access at home or work. We believe they must have equal access to the Information Superhighway."

The Electronic Frontier Foundation, a civil liberties group, released a new study on Monday that found popular filtering programs blocked tens of thousands of Web pages that contained no offensive content.

But patrons can always ask to have the filters disabled, said a spokesman for the filter company N2H2 Inc.

Many Libraries Will Skip Grants to Avoid Using Net Filters

Uncle Sam wants YOU to have no library access to potentially pornographic Web sites. But many local libraries will do whatever it takes to avoid computer filters that restrict access to information, even if it means losing their federal funding in lean economic times.

From Los Gatos to Livermore, library directors throughout the Bay Area vowed to continue upholding their patrons' First Amendment rights to free speech and freedom of information. Which means local library patrons should not expect their Internet access to change, despite a landmark ruling Monday by the U.S. Supreme Court requiring libraries receiving certain federal funds to install software filters to block pornography that could reach children.

"We just don't feel we as librarians need to be in the position of telling people what they should read, see or hear," said Susan Gallinger, director of the Livermore Public Library. "When you put filters on computers, that's what you're doing."

Gallinger said the Livermore library has been sued repeatedly for not restricting access to content that might be deemed objectionable.

Many libraries, including Livermore's, do not take money from the federal government, to avoid filter requirements. Those that do, including the San Jose Public system, said the funds are such a small part of their budget it might be worth it to refuse the money and avoid installing expensive software many patrons are opposed to.

In 1997, the San Jose City Council reaffirmed a policy that allows "unrestricted access to all library materials and services," said Gordon Yusko, a supervising librarian for 10 branches of the San Jose Public Library. None of the system's 211 computer terminals have filters on them, Yusko said, and so it will be up to the city whether to install the filtering software or give up the $20,000 the system receives annually in federal funds. The library's annual operating budget is $20 million.

In Mountain View, the five terminals in the children's reading section have filters that block pornographic Web sites. However, another 32 in the adult area are not blocked and are available to library patrons of all ages.

"We think it's very important for the parents to come to the library with

the children," said Karen Burnett, library director in Mountain View. "That’s the key, rather than some filter that you expect to solve all the problems."

Indeed, libraries that have filters haven’t been successful at eliminating all X-rated content from the eyes of children. Often they have impeded the ability of computer users to get to valid Web sites for information, including tips on treating everything from impotence to sexually transmitted diseases.

"Filters are far from perfect," said Linda Wood, librarian for the Alameda County system, which does have the devices at workstations in the children’s areas of the libraries.

"They filter out more than really needs to be filtered," Wood said, "and don’t get out everything that really needs to be, if you’re thinking about age-appropriate information."

Few local libraries support universal filtering, embracing instead some restricted access for minors.

At the Los Gatos Public Library, children are free to use any computer, although up to age 17 they must have parental permission, said assistant librarian Linda Dydo.

Palo Alto is buying software that will allow library patrons to choose a "filtering environment." Children will be issued "smart cards" on which their parents designate how much Internet access they have, said Diane Jennings, acting director of the libraries. Adult browsers would be able to choose whether to filter or not.

Many library patrons over the age of 18 said Monday they think that is a reasonable approach.

But protecting children shouldn’t come at the expense of adults who need legitimate medical information, said Jim MacKelvey, a Campbell programmer.

"It is a form of censorship. The liberal side of me says I don’t like any censorship," MacKelvey said. But at the same time, he doesn’t like unwanted images hogging Internet bandwidth, either.

"I wish we could have a regular Internet and a pornographic Internet," MacKelvey said. "Then it wouldn’t get in the way of people who want to use the Internet for normal stuff."

Questions and Answers on Web Filtering

The Supreme Court ruled Monday that Congress can force public libraries to use anti-pornography filters if they want to continue receiving federal funding for technology.

Critics have questioned the filters’ effectiveness and complain that they sometimes block legitimate sites, but the disputed law was upheld with the stipulation that libraries may disable the filters for patrons who ask.

Some questions and answers on Internet filters:

Q. How do filters work?

A. Filter software typically monitors and controls access to Web sites and other Internet material. When a library patron tries to visit a Web site, the filter decides whether to permit that connection. A filter may block the request if the site contains a banned keyword such as "breast," or if the site is on a predetermined list of banned addresses.

Q. What does the law say about filters?

A. Under a 2000 law, the Children's Internet Protection Act, schools and libraries that receive certain federal funds must block access to obscenity, child pornography and, while minors are using a computer, other materials deemed harmful to minors. Filters are widely regarded as the best way to meet those requirements. This case challenges only the provisions on libraries; a legal challenge to the filtering requirement for schools is now unlikely.

Q. Why are librarians making such a fuss?

A. Although obscenity and child pornography are illegal, other forms of pornography are protected under the First Amendment. In addition, filters often make mistakes and block health- and science-related educational sites. A Web site for House Majority Leader Dick Armey, for example, had nothing that could be construed as pornographic but was blocked at various times. Critics say they have found sites on art, human rights, sexual education and sexual orientation similarly blocked by filters. Seth Finkelstein, a leading filtering expert, terms it "electronic book burning."

Q. Can't patrons ask librarians to override filters when mistakes are made?

A. The Supreme Court ruling says librarians may do so, but critics are concerned that patrons may be embarrassed to ask if they are researching a sensitive topic, such as testicular cancer or sexually transmitted diseases. Having to ask, critics say, also delays research when many patrons' time on library computers is already limited by demand. Also, patrons may not know information is being blocked and thus would not know to ask.

Q. Who is affected by the ruling?

A. People without other Internet access - at work or at home - are most affected. They are primarily the poorer, the less educated and members of minority groups. Judith Klug, director of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, believes many libraries will turn down federal funding to keep unfettered access. But libraries in poorer communities won't have that option, she said.

Q. How much influence will private companies have over access?

A. Vendors of filtering software have generally kept their criteria secret for proprietary reasons, leading to complaints that they may be pushing their social agenda with no oversight. Filtering companies say their products can be customized, so a library may choose to override certain settings. One vendor, N2H2 Inc., says it has created an online database so customers may determine whether a particular site is blocked, though it offers few details about specifically why.

Q. Isn't my library already filtering the Internet computers?

A. Possibly. Although the American Library Association opposes filtering, many individual libraries do already filter, either on their own or to meet a local law. Klug estimates that nearly half of libraries use some filters, although many do it only for children’s sections.

Q. Are there any other legal options?

A. Though critics failed to convince the high court that the law is unconstitutional, they may still file a lawsuit later if they find specific examples of harm, such as a patron not being able to get a legitimate site unblocked promptly or at all.

Q. With filters in place, should patrons now worry about libraries monitoring and recording their activity?

A. Not likely, says Kevin Bankston, attorney and fellow with the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Although the software generally lets customers log usage and blockage patterns for later review, it can be done anonymously. Librarians, he says, have shown a willingness in the past to resist government efforts at surveillance and record-keeping.

Apple Expected to Preview Next OS X on Monday

Steve Jobs, co-founder and chief executive of Apple Computer Inc., on Monday will likely preview the next version of Apple’s OS X operating system, financial analysts said.

Analysts who follow Apple also expect the computer maker to dish out details of a faster microprocessor for the Macintosh.

Apple officials were not immediately available to comment.

Apple has said, however, that it will preview the next version of OS X, code-named Panther, before releasing it. Analysts expect it to contain significant refinements of what is already regarded as a stable, reliable and sleek operating system.

As for a refreshed Macintosh microprocessor, a faster chip made by International Business Machines Corp. could help close what has been called the "gigahertz gap" between Apple’s PowerPC chips and those from Intel Corp.

"Apple could preview its next-generation platform based on the long-awaited G5 chip," wrote Bear Stearns analyst Andrew Neff in a note to clients.

It has been a big year for Apple, which launched its own online music store - backed by record labels - in April. The service lets users download songs for 99 cents apiece with no subscription fee, unlike other online music services.

"The chip refresh, which people are calling the G5, seems to be a pretty obvious one," said Roger Kay, an analyst for market researcher IDC.

Jobs is expected to take center stage next week at the Moscone West convention center in San Francisco to give a keynote speech at the company’s Worldwide Developer Conference. Typically, Apple saves its

biggest announcements for the Macworld Expo, held twice yearly. But this year, Jobs is not scheduled to appear at the Macworld CreativePro event next month in New York.

Apple has seen its market share of the personal computer market dwindle to 2 percent worldwide, and while credited for sleek, well-designed and easy-to-use computers, has not had much success in increasing sales of its Macintosh computers, particularly desktops, Kay said.

"That's a historical low," Kay said of Apple's market share.

But some analysts see the new IBM 970 processor, referred to by some as the G5, as helping to change that.

"Sales of Apple's high-end PowerMac family, which have fallen for two years, could rebound beginning in the first quarter of fiscal 2004 because of an alignment of three key PowerMac sales drivers," wrote Needham & Co. analyst Charles Wolf in a note to clients.

He pointed to new PowerMacs using the faster chip that he expects to be introduced on Monday; Quark Express, one of the most popular desktop publishing software programs, has been released for Mac OS X; and the advertising market for the fall television season has shown "surprising strength."

This last factor, Wolf said, could augur for increased demand for the PowerMac among graphics professionals.

Wolf also cited continuing momentum for Apple's online music store, which is incorporated into its iTunes digital music software, which he said has sold 3.5 million downloads in the past six weeks.

"Apple could have a winner on its hands, especially when it introduces a Windows version later this year," Wolf wrote.

Apple has said that the music store will increase demand for its popular iPod digital music players.

Wolf also noted that the new 970 chips will run at 1.4 gigahertz, or billion cycles per second, to 1.8 gigahertz, compared with Intel's Pentium 4 chips that run at more than 3.0 gigahertz.

"However, the 970 could reach a 2.5 gigahertz speed by mid-2004 and 4.0 to 5.0 gigahertz speeds by 2005," Wolf wrote.

AOL Offers a Sneak Peek at 9.0

America Online released details of its upcoming Internet access software Thursday, saying that AOL 9.0 Optimized will offer enhanced mail and security features, a Web accelerator, and 3D animated buddy icons, among other bells and whistles geared at personalization and entertainment.

The new software, which will be made available to existing AOL members in the third quarter of this year, represents the third upgrade AOL has made to its service in the last 10 months. The software will be more widely distributed beginning in October, an AOL representative said.

The focus of this new version of the software will be AOL's new instant messaging capabilities, such as the 3D animated buddy icons, dubbed SuperBuddy icons.

"We want to deliver something fun and interesting to our members," said AOL spokesperson Anne Bentley.

At launch, AOL will offer 50 original icons, some of which animate common chat phrases by turning them into characters. The expression "LOL" - for laugh out loud - may be displayed as a comical character when a user types those letters, for example.

The new IM capabilities will also allow users to conduct real-time voice conversations and share digital pictures and Webcam clips. The company is also offering IM Bots that serve up stock quotes, news, movie times, and other information.

AOL's emphasis on instant messaging comes as the company released a report Thursday saying that 76 percent of the Internet users they surveyed use an IM application and that six of 10 personalize the application with elements such as icons, wallpaper, and sounds.

Besides new IM offerings, the service also includes enhanced e-mail features such as built-in spam filters and added parental controls, and management tools that allow members to view recently received mail at a glance or view all of their mail from one place.

Additionally, 9.0 Optimized users will be able to permanently store 20MB of mail on AOL servers, the company said, and will include a free Web accelerator technology for speedier Web browsing.

AOL 9.0 will also extend the company's family-focused services, offering a parentally controlled account which can be used to give kids an online allowance.

Details of the service were released as the company kicked off an online promotional campaign Thursday, aimed at migrating users to the upcoming software. A sneak peek of the service can be seen online at www.aolepk.com.

Apple Releases Safari 1.0

During his Worldwide Developers Conference keynote, Apple CEO Steve Jobs announced that Apple would make the final version of its Safari Web browser available for download Monday. It's available for download from Apple's Web site and through the Software Update System Preferences pane.

Jobs told the assembled developers that Safari has seen over five million downloads of the beta versions in the past six months; version 1.0 will be the default browser for the new Power Mac G5s coming in August. Also, Apple released a Safari SDK (Software Developer Kit), so that developers can embed the browser's HTML rendering engine directly into their applications.

Safari 1.0 requires Mac OS X 10.2 ("Jaguar") or higher and is optimized for Mac OS X 10.2.3 "Jaguar" or later. The final version of the browser is localized for English, Japanese, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Brazilian Portuguese, French Canadian, Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, Swedish, Korean and Simplified Chinese.

OpenOffice 1.0 Launched

OpenOffice 1.0 has reached final release status. The open-source office-software suite is based on Sun Microsystems' Star Office suite, and has taken developers two years to complete.

The free application comprises word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, and drawing programs in more than 25 languages. It supports a wide range of file formats, so users can exchange documents with users of other office-software suites, such as Microsoft Office.

The software takes advantage of the popularity of X11 in the open-source world, and incorporates FreeType's font engine for anti-aliased fonts. It runs natively on Linux , PPC Linux, Solaris, Windows, and many other flavors of Unix.

OpenOffice developer Dan Williams said: "Anti-aliasing makes OpenOffice.org look exceptional on Mac OS X. It makes presentations and all other documents look highly professional."

"This release is a triumph for the collaboration between the open-source community and enterprises such as Sun and Apple," said OpenOffice.org community manager Louis Suarez-Potts. "OpenOffice 1.0 frees you from lock-in and licensing fees."

OpenOffice 1.0 is available for free download from the OpenOffice.org. It has been developed as an X11 rather than Aqua application, but runs in Apple's X11 environment.

Google Puts Gadgets in Browser Toolbar

Online search engine Google introduced several new gadgets in its popular toolbar for Web browsers, hoping to build even greater brand loyalty amid heightened competition.

The new software out Thursday for the toolbar includes a feature that automatically blocks pop-up ads, as well a program that automatically fills out Internet forms seeking a customer's name and address.

The function that fills in forms offers an option to store credit card numbers too, but the information is encrypted on the hard drive of a user's computer instead of Google's computers, for security and privacy reasons.

The toolbar also enables users to transfer online content to Internet journals known as Weblogs, or "blogs," by pressing a button.

Google emphasized that the new toolbar is still being tested and could be revised later.

The new features represent Google's most ambitious upgrade of its toolbar since the Mountain View, Calif.-based company offered the software in December 2000. The toolbar works only on Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer, the world's dominant Web browser.

Google created the toolbar so users could conduct online searches without going to Google’s Web site. The toolbar is embedded within the Explorer browser.

Although it won’t provide specific figures, Google says millions of Web surfers have downloaded its toolbar in the past 2 1/2 years.

The success of Google’s toolbar has inspired a wide variety of other Web sites to offer similar software.

Google hopes its improvements will encourage more people to download its toolbar and create even more visibility for one of the Internet’s best-known names.

The toolbar improvements are being rolled out as some powerful rivals take aim at Google’s leadership in the lucrative field of online search.

Yahoo! Inc. is spending millions on a marketing campaign touting the power of its search engine, which licenses some of its technology from Google. Microsoft is also investing heavily in technology to improve its MSN.com search engine.

Kazaa Version 2.5 Ships

Sharman Networks launched an update to its popular file-swapping Kazaa Media Desktop software Tuesday, promising an improved interface, better search options, plus a new program that rewards users willing to share their PC with the network.

Sharman partner Brilliant Digital Entertainment and its subsidiary Altnet have added a new feature to KMD version 2.5 that adds a new peer-to-peer network and a program called Peer Points Manager. The controversial program, announced earlier this month, offers rewards for participating users.

Industry watchers suggest the latest update is an attempt by Sharman to position Kazaa as a viable music-for-sale service, not a digital music piracy tool.

"The more Kazaa steers its users to buy content rather than download it for free, the more it bolsters Kazaa’s argument that it’s acting as legitimate service and not a media piracy haven," says Lee Black, senior analyst with Jupiter Research.

Most people use Kazaa to share multimedia content for free, but the latest software update also lets Sharman push premium music, video, and software content available for purchase. The software uses special icons to distinguish premium content from the free stuff within standard search results.

The Peer Points system lets you trade hard drive space and Internet bandwidth for points redeemable for premium content, cash, and prizes. Kazaa uses your hard-drive space to store this premium content, and it utilizes your bandwidth to send it to other Kazaa users.

Altnet Chief Executive Officer Kevin Bermeister has likened this approach

to baiting illegal file swappers into buying legitimate content.

The company’s biggest challenge, however, likely won’t be in attracting willing users, but in gathering the multimedia content people want.

"The biggest trick for Kazaa is attracting quality content that people want to buy," says Susan Kevorkian, senior analyst with market researcher IDC.

"It’s still very much in the air whether Kazaa can win the hearts of content owners with the baggage of running a free peer-to-peer file swapping network at the same time."

In addition to its new Peer Point System, Kazaa 2.5 also includes new tabbed search results that let you run multiple searches at one time. Each new search you perform opens a new tab, so that you’re no longer automatically overwriting your previous search.

You can also search the Web from within Kazaa 2.5 using the Web Search panel powered by Overture, says a Sharman spokesperson.

Another new feature is called Participation Level. In an effort to boost file quality and sharing, the software rewards users who consistently offer many high-quality files. Score enough points and you’ll get more search results as well as priority over others when vying for the same file to download.

Other improvements include virus scanning of files through Kazaa partner Bullguard and access to the online dating service AmericanSingles.com. The beta preview of the software also introduces eight content channels, which link to various music, games, software, and community destinations.

eBay to Expand Buyer Safeguards, Advertising

Online auctioneer eBay Inc. will add new safeguards to protect purchases on its Web site and expand an advertising program to help sellers promote their wares, eBay’s chief executive said on Friday.

Meg Whitman, chief of one of the few Internet companies to move through the dot-com bust relatively unscathed, was speaking here to a packed auditorium full of the sites’ users, who gave her a rousing standing ovation.

But her speech at the eBay Live user conference here was upstaged by a surprise performer - comedic singer "Weird Al" Yankovic, who sang "eBay," a parody of a popular Backstreet Boys song.

In her address, Whitman also said the company would test a new program that deducts purchases automatically from the financial accounts of bidders as soon as they win an auction.

Under the expanded buyer protection program, Whitman said sellers who use the PayPal payment system and have at least 50 feedback ratings from buyers, with at least 98 percent of those ratings positive, would be able to offer buyers $500 protection on their purchases, with no deductible.

For eBay’s top merchants, the "PowerSellers," Whitman said the company will offer a cooperative advertising program that will partially reimburse them

for print ads they place advertising their businesses, provided they have established a storefront on the site.

More than 10,000 people are attending the conference, including users from all 50 states and 20 countries, which Whitman said was twice the number that attended last year.

eBay has become something of a phenomenon, where everything from electronics to entire cities is sold. The company handled as many as 7.7 million bids in a single day earlier this year. Whitman said the company counts on user feedback to improve the site’s popular interface.

"We don’t always get it right the first time, but our goal is to do it right," she said.

More than 150,000 people make their living from eBay and one of their biggest problems is bidders who win an auction and do not pay. To combat this, Whitman said the company will limit the number of bids that can be made by people who have negative feedback for not paying.

The "immediate payment" program, where buyers who have made a purchase under a fixed-price auction will have the purchase price immediately drawn from their credit cards or other accounts, will be tried first in eBay’s tickets and media business.

She also said the company would make an announcement later in the day with the U.S. Small Business Administration about support for people’s eBay businesses, although she did not provide any details.

Whitman was later joined on stage by Pierre Omidyar, eBay’s chairman and founder. Omidyar is still the company’s largest shareholder, with a stake worth more than $6 billion. The two discussed the site’s history and Omidyar’s reasons for starting it in the first place in September 1995.

Omidyar started to tell a story of how he was amazed that a big company like Sun Microsystems would want to sell on eBay, when Whitman cut him off and said: "They’re a sponsor here!"

Omidyar grew silent and began staring off into space, drawing laughs from the crowd.

Microsoft Wins Appeal on Sun’s Java

A federal appeals court on Thursday handed Microsoft Corp. a legal victory, overturning a ruling that would have forced the company to incorporate Sun Microsystems Inc.’s Java programming language in the Windows operating system.

Sun will now press its case against the world’s largest software company with the trial court, unless the parties decide to try to reach a settlement.

The three-judge panel in Richmond, Virginia, said a lower court judge had erred by granting Sun a preliminary injunction ordering Microsoft to carry its rival’s software, a penalty the lower court judge said was necessary to make up for Microsoft’s past misdeeds.

At the same time, the appeals judges upheld a lower court ruling that Microsoft had broken a 2001 legal settlement between the companies and infringed on Sun’s copyrights.

The judges sent the case back to the lower-court judge, U.S. District Judge J. Frederick Motz, for further proceedings.

A date has not yet been set for the full trial, but Sun executives said on Thursday they expected it to start some time in 2005.

George Mason University law professor Ernest Gellhorn said the judges handed Microsoft a legal victory by delaying any possible sanctions against it for several years.

And while the two sides prepare for trial, the appeals ruling could set the stage for settlement talks, Gellhorn said.

In recent months Microsoft has settled antitrust cases filed by several states, as well as an antitrust suit filed by its biggest competitor, AOL Time Warner Inc.

"They clearly are in the process of trying to settle what they can," Gellhorn said.

Motz was assigned cases arising from the landmark government antitrust suit against Microsoft filed in 1998. He concluded in a Dec. 23 ruling that Sun had a good chance of winning its private case against Microsoft.

Sun, based in Santa Clara, California, accuses Microsoft of trying to sabotage Java, which can run on a variety of operating systems, because it threatens the dominance of the Windows system.

Sun, which is seeking $1 billion in damages, charges Microsoft’s acts against Java include polluting a version of the software and dropping it from Windows XP.

Without the injunction, Motz said, the contest between Java and Microsoft’s .NET Web service software could "tip" in favor of .NET because of Microsoft’s past antitrust law violations.

But the appeals court judges said the lower-court ruling was legally flawed. They said there was not enough evidence to justify a preliminary injunction by proving that Sun would suffer "immediate irreparable harm" without it.

Microsoft responded with a statement calling the court’s ruling "a positive step." It said it will abide by the court’s copyright ruling and has already stopped the practices that Sun has cited as copyright violations.

Sun released a statement of its own saying the company was "disappointed with the delay that results from the court’s determination."

Nevertheless, Sun expressed confidence about its chances at trial. Sun legal affairs vice president Lee Patch said the company might ask Motz to clarify some of his legal reasoning and reissue the must-carry order.

In the meantime, Patch said, the copyright ruling has already prompted computer manufacturers to gravitate toward its Java software.

A settlement of the government antitrust suit against Microsoft was

endorsed by another federal judge, U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly, in November. Massachusetts' attorney general is appealing that ruling.

In the government case, an appeals court in June of 2001 upheld trial court findings that Microsoft had illegally maintained its Windows operating system monopoly, but rejected breaking the company in two as a remedy.

Torvalds Speaks Out

Linus Torvalds, the creator and chief developer of Linux, last week weighed in on the legal battle between The SCO Group and IBM, defending Linux and stating there has been no end-user or developer push-back against the open-source operating system as a result of the legal battle.

SCO is suing IBM for more than $1 billion and claims that Linux is an unauthorized derivative of Unix, to which it holds all copyrights.

Torvalds told eWEEK in an e-mail interview last week that he does not believe that Linux is an unauthorized derivative of Unix, as SCO has claimed, and that he has no intention of changing the Linux development model.

"I allege SCO is full of it and that the Linux development model is the most transparent process in the whole industry," he said. "Let's face it, nobody else even comes close to being as good at showing the evolution and source of every single line of code out there.

"The only party that has had serious problems clarifying what they are talking about is SCO. ... I'm sure that they are confident that they own the collective work of Unix, but that's a separate thing entirely legally from being the actual copyright owner of any specific section of code," Torvalds said.

SCO has no intellectual property claims as far as he knows, Torvalds said. Indeed, he argues that the lawsuit is not about intellectual property but rather about a contract dispute with IBM.

Asked whether he intended to get involved in the legal battle, Torvalds said that the less he has to do with lawsuits, the happier he is. But he would go to court if called as an expert witness.

Torvalds is also confident that SCO's claims are not negatively affecting the open-source software business.

"I am not aware of that legal battle affecting how any of the developers are working on the current kernel, although I do suspect a fair amount of time has been wasted just worrying about it. I've also not seen end users respond in any way to the SCO-IBM spat," Torvalds said.

Officials at Linux vendors Red Hat Inc., of Raleigh, N.C., and SuSE Linux AG, in Nuremberg, Germany, agreed, saying they have seen no falloff in customer interest or adoptions since the SCO-IBM battle began.

Torvalds also announced last week that he is taking a leave of absence from Transmeta Corp. to work full time as a Fellow at the Open Source Development Lab, in Beaverton, Ore. OSDL CEO Stuart Cohen said he has not

seen anti-Linux reaction in the enterprise.

"They are concerned about these developments, [but] it is not changing their business plans," Cohen said. "Many of them are now spending money on due diligence, money they weren't spending six months ago, but that is not leading them down the path of migrating away from plans to use Linux," he said.

Some enterprise Linux users continue to embrace and expand their Linux usage. Travel Web site Orbitz LLC uses more than 750 Linux machines in its production environments and continues to roll out more every month.

A company spokeswoman in Chicago told eWEEK that the SCO litigation is having no negative effect on Orbitz's decision to move forward with Linux plans. "Linux allows Orbitz to create a one-of-a-kind, low-fare search engine; a new system that has horizontal scalability and dynamic addition/subtraction of hardware; and differentiating functionality such as our new Flex Search," she said.

Torvalds also dismissed talk that some members of the OSDL might now try to sway his focus and get him to include more of the enterprise technologies they want, saying his contract with the Lab gives him the final word on the kernel and that the copyright remains with him personally.

Torvalds also said that although the release of the next Linux kernel upgrade, Version 2.6, has been delayed into the second half of this year, he is "pretty happy with where we are. Delayed (as usual), but there are no big showstoppers. We're getting to the point where I'll start doing the so-called prekernels to encourage more people to start testing stuff heavily."

The current work on the kernel mostly involves a lot of "locking down the hatches," he said, but that has resulted in some of the bug fixing degenerating into "cleanups" again, so Torvalds said he is going to have to try to persuade people to let it go and just fix bugs.

Microsoft Employees Arrested for Stealing Software

A former Microsoft Corp. employee was arrested on Monday for allegedly ordering more than $17 million of software via an internal purchasing system and then selling it to keep the
proceeds for himself.

Richard Gregg, 43, was also indicted on Monday on 62 counts of mail and computer fraud, according to court papers.

Gregg allegedly ordered 5,436 pieces of software worth more than $17 million at retail price, which he sold for a profit, according to an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Washington.

Gregg, who pleaded not guilty to the charges, was fired from Microsoft in December 2002, at the same time when another Microsoft employee was also terminated on suspicion of ordering software and reselling it for a profit.

Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft said that Gregg, a project coordinator

for developing Windows, the company’s flagship operating system, was one of the reasons why the company adopted a more stringent anti-theft policy late last year.

"When we identified this activity last December, we immediately took several steps to ensure this would not happen again and referred Gregg to law enforcement officials," said John Connors, Microsoft’s Chief Financial Officer, who also oversees internal administration.

"Since that time, we have been working very closely with the FBI and U.S. Attorney’s office on the investigation and have made changes to our internal ordering system to prevent this from happening again," Connors said a prepared statement.

Microsoft hired investigators and put in updated systems to crack down on violations of internal policy after Daniel Feussner, a former Microsoft manager, was fired and arrested in December 2002 for allegedly funding a lavish lifestyle by selling discounted software for personal profit. Feussner later died in a local hospital after ingesting antifreeze.

Gregg allegedly ordered software at a deep discount from Microsoft’s internal purchasing system from January to December of 2002, according to the indictment.

Recording Industry to Sue Internet Song Swappers

A recording-industry trade group said on Wednesday it plans to sue hundreds of individuals who illegally distribute copyrighted songs over the Internet, expanding its anti-piracy fight into millions of homes.

The Recording Industry Association of America said it hopes to curb online song-swapping by tracking down the heaviest users of popular "peer to peer" services like Kazaa and suing them for damages that could range up to $150,000 per violation.

The announcement from the RIAA, whose members include AOL Time Warner Inc and Sony Corp, marks a sharp escalation in the industry’s battle against Internet piracy, which so far has concentrated on shutting down the services themselves.

Peer-to-peer users now copy more than 2.6 billion songs, movies and other files from each others’ computers each month, according to industry estimates. Executives believe such file trading has led to a 14 percent slide in revenues since pioneering service Napster was introduced in 1999.

The RIAA has shut down Napster and several other peer-to-peer networks, and has leaned on universities, businesses and other institutions to make sure their computers block such activity. It sued four college students who operated file-trading networks on campus, reaching settlements between $12,000 and $17,500 each.

But the industry has until now shied away from directly suing users, opting instead to send them online warnings and clutter up the networks with dummy files.

RIAA President Cary Sherman said the time was right to go after individual users because a recent U.S. court ruling makes it easier to track down

copyright violators through their Internet providers. A U.S. appeals court in Washington said earlier this month that copyright investigators do not need a subpoena to force Internet providers to reveal the name of customers who may be distributing copyrighted files.

While peer-to-peer users may believe that they remain anonymous online, "you are engaging in an activity that is every bit as public as setting up a stall at a local flea market," Sherman said in a conference call.

Other music executives said legitimate services like Apple Computer Inc.’s iTunes are beginning to catch on and provide a viable alternative.

Starting on Thursday, investigators will track down users who make their digital-music collections available for copying, he said. Those who download songs but do not allow others to copy them will not initially be targeted.

The trade group will probably file several hundred lawsuits in six to eight weeks, Sherman said.

Music fans who wish to avoid legal action should change the settings on their peer-to-peer software to block access to their hard drives or un-install the software completely, he said.

Reaction to the announcement was mixed.

The president of the Grokster peer-to-peer network said that while he does not support copyright infringement, the move could further estrange avid music fans.

"The RIAA, in their infinite wisdom, has decided to not only alienate their own customers but attempt to drive them into bankruptcy through litigation," said Grokster President Wayne Rosso, who won a courtroom victory in April when a judge ruled that his network should not be shut down because it could not control what users chose to trade.

One copyright expert who has clashed with the RIAA in the past said she preferred that the industry go after big violators rather than relying on copy-protection technologies that could limit law-abiding citizens’ rights.

"On a visceral level it doesn’t sound like it’s the smartest thing to do, but obviously they’ve done the cost-benefit analysis and they’ve decided they have to do it," said Gigi Sohn, president of Public Knowledge, a nonprofit advocacy group.

Music Labels Plan Web Dragnet

The Recording Industry Association of America said that beginning today it ill launch a massive electronic dragnet to gather evidence against those ho use Kazaa, Grokster and other popular file-swapping networks to trade opyrighted music. The first of perhaps thousands of civil lawsuits could be iled by August.

"Make no mistake about it. The law is very clear," RIAA President Cary Sherman said Wednesday in a conference call with reporters. "When you make available copyrighted music on the Internet without permission, what you’re oing is stealing. And if you get caught stealing, you could face both civil

nd criminal prosecution."

A recent federal district court ruling all but assured the strategy to target individuals, after a judge in Los Angeles found that the companies behind popular file-sharing software like Morpehus and Grokster could not be held liable for illegal activities of their users. That April ruling is under appeal.

The recording industry has been laying the legal groundwork for this new, more personal assault on Internet music piracy for more than a year. It subpoenaed Verizon Internet Services in July for the name of a individual subscriber accused of downloading more than 600 songs via Kazaa. When Verizon refused, the RIAA successfully compelled the disclosure through federal court.

That case, while still under appeal, established the recording industry's right to use subpoena power granted under federal copyright law to identify uspected copyright infringers.

Critics question the strategy of spending money to quash file-swapping instead of finding a way to legitimize services that 40 million people have used to download music, according to the latest estimates from market researcher Ipsos-Insight.

"There are more people using file-sharing in the U.S. than voted for President Bush," said Fred von Lohmann, the Electronic Frontier Foundation ttorney who represents StreamCast Networks, creator of the Morpheus ile-swapping software. "The answer has to be to find a way to get artists aid."

Grokster President Wayne Rosso said the recording industry isn't looking for solutions - it's bent on destroying something it can't control.

"Somebody's got to put Prozac in the water cooler at the RIAA. These people are out of control," said Rosso.

The recording industry has tried a variety of campaigns to curb online music piracy. But it hasn't gone far enough, say the record labels, songwriters, music retailers and industry professionals. Sales and shipments of music have fallen 26 percent since 1999 when Napster popularized the file-sharing phenomenon.

"At this stage after a very long, multipronged approach to try to deal with the problem of theft, there are few options left to us," said Zach Horowitz, president and chief operating officer of Universal Music Group. "We're trying to get a message across that this is illegal behavior. That people who do it are not anonymous. And that there are repercussions for doing it."

The record labels aren't the only businesses reeling from online piracy. Songwriters, independent labels and retailers and even studio managers have all felt the pinch.

Hugh Prestwood, a country music songwriter who has composed eight million-selling songs, said file-sharing threatens to rob him of the retirement income he hoped for from royalties.

The RIAA was deliberately vague about its electronic evidence-gathering techniques. It will use software to capture the unique computer addresses of users offering unauthorized copies of a given song, along with the date

and time. It will then subpoena Internet providers, which are compelled as a result of the Verizon case to furnish the name of the computer user.

"Obviously, the more files you offer for upload, the bigger a target you make for yourself," said Sherman, noting the industry would not distinguish between adult and teenage users of file-swapping services. It would simply pursue the "worst offenders."

Sherman predicts that a few, well-placed suits would be enough to deter others. That was the case in April when the RIAA sued four college students for allegedly operating mini-Napster servers on campus. Overnight, 20 similar underground dorm-room operations shut down, he said. The RIAA settled the cases last month for amounts ranging from $12,000 to $17,500.

Phil Leigh, vice president of Raymond James & Associates, predicts this new anti-piracy campaign will be a deterrent. But, because the world of Windows computers lacks a flexible, popular equivalent to Apple Computer's successful iTunes Music Store, consumers will be driven straight to their CD burners.

"Essentially, kids will trade CDs among themselves and rip the content into their own PCs," wrote Leigh.

Changes for eBay?

eBay, the online auction house that collected $1.2 billion in revenues last year, may be forced to change the way it does business, soon. On May 28, a Norfolk, Virginia jury ruled that eBay infringes on patents held by Great Falls, Virginia entrepreneur Thomas G. Woolston, ordering the company to pay Woolston $35 million in damages.

US District Court Judge Jerome B. Friedman must approve the verdict, which will probably be appealed, but eBay may be forced to give up much more than the jury's one-time damage payment. Judge Friedman will also decide whether eBay should pay Woolston license fees or change part of its business. Woolston's law firm, Hunton & Williams, estimates that 26 percent of eBay's revenue comes from business operations that infringe on its client's patents.

The Norfolk jury ruled that eBay violated Woolston's patents by equipping its site with an automated payment service and by selling items at a fixed price through its subsidiary, Half.com. Woolston and his lawyers also claim that he patented the basic auctioning system at the heart of eBay's business, but Judge Friedman threw out this claim before the trial began.

Woolston-who also has a pending claim against Priceline.com, the site that lets you bid for airplane flights, hotel rooms, and rental cars-filed the first of his online auction patents in 1995. Just a few months later, eBay launched its site. Woolston, according to his lawyers, tried to start his own online auction house but quickly gave up in the face of eBay's immense success. He then decided that his company, now called MercExchange, would enforce his patents solely through licensing.

As the Washington Post said just after the jury verdict, many legal experts were surprised the case even went to trial. They question whether so-called business-method patents like Woolston's-which define a new way of doing business as opposed to a new technology-should be allowed. But many others

aren’t surprised at all. Such patents have been on firm legal ground ever since a 1998 ruling by the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington DC. "The court changed the law with respect to patentable subject matter and now allows US patents for business methods, which are not based on new technology," says John S. Paniaguas, a partner in the Intellectual Property Law Department at the Chicago law firm Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman.

Most famously, Amazon.com sued its chief competitor, Barnes & Noble.com, in 1999, claiming that the Express Checkout service at Barnes & Noble.com was an imitation of Amazon’s patented 1-Click system, a means of quickly ordering merchandise from the Amazon Web site. Many Internet users felt 1-Click wasn’t innovative enough to warrant a patent. It was built around existing technologies like browser cookies, they said, and based on a fairly obvious idea. In February of 2000, Tim O’Reilly, founder and president of computer-book publisher O’Reilly & Associates, collected 10,000 signatures for an open letter to Jeff Bezos, the founder and CEO of Amazon.com, that complained about the patent. But Amazon had enough leverage to settle the suit in its favor in March of 2002. Though Express Checkout is still a part of the Barnes & Noble site, the service doesn’t let you make purchases as quickly as it once did.

According to Paniaguas, eBay is now in a similar situation to the one Barnes & Noble.com was in. "It’s now very difficult to invalidate business method patents," he says.

Thousands Sign Up for Anti-Telemarketing List

Hundreds of thousands of Americans hoping to keep unwanted telephone sales calls at bay signed on to a free "do not call" list on Friday that will prevent most telemarketers from bothering them at home.

Eager Americans rushed to place their home phone numbers on the Federal Trade Commission’s list shortly after President Bush unveiled it in a White House ceremony.

By 2:30 p.m. EDT the list had grown to 635,000 and was on pace to top 2 million by midnight West Coast time, an FTC spokeswoman said.

The do-not-call list should help Americans enjoy their private time without unwanted interruptions, Bush said a few hours after the list was opened up for registration.

"When Americans are sitting down to dinner or a parent is reading to his or her child, the last thing they need is a call from a stranger with a sales pitch," Bush said in a White House Rose Garden ceremony.

Telemarketers who call numbers on the list after Oct. 1 will face penalties of up to $11,000 per call, as well as possible consumer lawsuits.

Consumers can sign up for the list by logging on to (http://donotcall.gov), while those living west of the Mississippi river can also register by calling 1-888-382-1222.

Consumers will not have to pay to get on the list, as it will be funded by telemarketers.

Plunging long-distance rates and computerized dialers have led to a five-fold increase in telemarketing calls over the past decade, prompting a deluge of consumer complaints.

Telemarketers have bitterly opposed the list, but FTC Chairman Timothy Muris said it would help them target consumers who do not mind getting sales calls.

"If you talk privately with telemarketers ... they will tell you that they don’t want to call people who don’t want to be called," Muris said at the White House.

Do-not-call lists have proven popular in the roughly 25 states that have set them up. In Minnesota, for example, roughly half of the state’s 2.2 million residential line subscribers have registered.

FTC officials ultimately expect 60 million households to sign up for the national list, prompting the agency to delay telephone-based registration until July 7 for those living east of the Mississippi in an effort to handle demand.

Individuals across the country said they had trouble getting on to the Web site on Friday morning, or were kicked off once they started the registration process. FTC spokeswoman Cathy MacFarlane said the Web site was receiving 1,000 hits per second.

Consumers don’t need to rush as they have all summer to sign up and will not see a drop-off in telemarketing calls until Oct. 1, MacFarlane said, adding they will still be able to sign up for the list after the summer.

The list does not cover all callers. Nonprofit and political callers will be free to ignore it, but will have to honor consumer requests not to be called back. Businesses will be free to call customers for 18 months after making a sale, but they too will have to honor opt-out requests.

Telemarketing groups have sued to scratch the effort, arguing that it abridges free-speech rights, and say it could wreak havoc on an industry that employs 2 million.

Privacy advocate Jason Catlett, who has pushed for a national list for years, said he has little sympathy for their plight.

"Free speech doesn’t give you the right to pester people in their homes when they don’t want to be pestered," said Catlett, president of Junkbusters Corp., which helps clients avoid unwanted commercial pitches.

Spreading Internet Virus Spoofs E-Mail Addresses

A new variant of a computer virus spreading around the Internet on Thursday spoofs the e-mail address of the sender, making it difficult to determine the source of infection, antivirus experts said.

Computer security companies were rating the virus, dubbed "Sobig.e," as a medium risk for both corporate and consumer users.

Although the worm, which is a self-propagating virus, does not do much harm to infected machines, the fact that it masquerades as legitimate e-mail

from known e-mail accounts randomly picked from infected computers makes it hard to detect, anti-virus experts said.

The worm, which can affect any kind of e-mail program, infects an individual computer when users open an attachment in the form of a .ZIP-type compression file, said Craig Schmugar, virus research engineer at Network Associates Inc.

The malicious program then mails itself to recipients extracted from the victim’s e-mail address book and can also spread over shared networks, experts said.

Similar to earlier Sobig viruses, this version grabs e-mail addresses on infected computers and randomly picks names to send itself to and other names that it displays as the sender.

"Spoofing (the sender address) can make the viruses last a little longer because in a non-spoofing e-mail you can hit "reply" to that message" and alert the sender that they are infected, Schmugar said.

Subject lines include "Re: Application," "Re: Movie," or any of 16 other simple phrases, according to Symantec Corp.

The new variant was detected on Wednesday but was picking up steam on Thursday.

The origin of the virus and how many computers it had infected were not immediately known.

Symantec received nearly 1,000 submissions of copies of the virus in one day, said Vincent Weafer, director of the Security Research Center at Symantec.

That compares to a few hundred for a typical big virus, he said. Home users seem to be particularly affected, he said.

"It is interacting with spam and getting re-sent around," he said. "Or it is tied on to large mailing lists."

Last year’s infamous "Klez" worm also spoofed the e-mail address of the sender, Schmugar said.

"Klez was probably one of the first where a number of companies made public statements" after they were falsely accused by others of spreading the virus, he said.

Sobig.e is timed to expire on July 14, the security experts said.

Software from Network Associates and other major anti-virus providers blocks the worm and Symantec offers free Sobig removal software.

While Sobig.e is more annoying than it is harmful, some prior versions had the ability to leave a backdoor open on the computer that could allow a remote attacker easy access to the system, Schmugar said.

The first version, Sobig.a, showed up in January. Both Schmugar and Weafer said they expect to see new versions of the worm in the future.

Web Privacy Policies Confuse Net Surfers

"Privacy policies" that explain a company's Web surveillance habits have done little to dispel confusion among Internet users about how they are tracked online, according to a report released on Wednesday.

The dense, legalistic documents that many commercial Web sites post to explain their data-collection habits are more likely to provide false reassurance than clarity to Web surfers, the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center found.

Prompted by privacy concerns and the threat of national legislation, most top Web sites now contain prominent links to privacy policies that explain how visitors are tracked and what is done with e-mail addresses, names and other personal information they provide.

But while the disclosures may provide a measure of legal protection for the Web sites in question, they often end up misleading or confusing visitors, the report found.

More than half of the 1,200 adults surveyed for the report wrongly believed that the mere presence of a privacy policy meant that that the Web site would not sell or trade personal information about them.

Although many Web sites provide free content to visitors who provide their names, e-mail addresses and other personal information, 85 percent said they would rather pay a fee for anonymous access or get that information offline.

"People have no clue as to what goes on behind their screens," said Joseph Turow, the Annenberg professor who wrote the report.

Turow recommended that Web sites be required to translate their privacy policies into a machine-readable code called P3P that would allow users to automatically steer away from sites that they would find too invasive. P3P was introduced over a year ago but has not been widely adopted.

Web sites should also be required to disclose in plain language what they know about their visitors, what they have done with that information, and what they plan to learn about them, he said.

Microsoft's Gates Says Fighting Spam a Priority

In his second message in as many days, Microsoft Corp. Chairman Bill Gates wrote an open letter on Tuesday vowing to make the fight against spam, or unsolicited email, one of the No.1 software maker's top priorities.

Gates' letter to customers, used in the past to mark important shifts in Microsoft's strategy, was sent on the heels of a opinion piece he published on Monday entitled "Why I Hate Spam."

"Unsolicited commercial email is a spreading plague that feeds off the unique power of the Internet to connect hundreds of millions of computer users around the world, at virtually no cost," Gates wrote in his latest attack against spam.

Both emails this week underscore the threat that spam poses to Microsoft's business, said Matt Rosoff, an analyst at Directions on Microsoft, an independent research company.

"It's indicative of a real effort on Microsoft's part to get serious about spam," Rosoff said, "Spam is the number one factor ruining people's Internet experience, which in turn could hurt PC sales."

Microsoft's Windows operating system runs on more than 95 percent of the world's personal computers.

Like almost everyone, I receive a lot of spam every day, much of it offering to help me get out of debt or get rich quick," said Gates, who ranks as the world's richest man. "It's ridiculous."

Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft has embarked on a campaign over the last few months to convince the public that it is serious about curtailing the growth of spam.

Last week, Microsoft filed 15 lawsuits against individuals and businesses that it said are responsible for flooding its Internet service arm with more than 2 billion spam messages.

In April, Microsoft teamed up with AOL Time Warner and Yahoo! Inc. to block spam and stop spammers from creating fraudulent e-mail accounts.

A team of about 20 experts within Microsoft was also recently created to tackle the spam problem and to pull together Microsoft's various anti-spam efforts and research.

Calling spam a "drain on productivity," Gates said that unsolicited email is also becoming a costly drag on large and small businesses.

Gates also outlined his support for a proposed law that would encourage commercial email senders to adopt clear guidelines for commercial email, so that any anti-spam legislation doesn't shut out legitimate businesses.

"These and other efforts across many fronts should lead to a world where we are less troubled by spam," said Gates. "At Microsoft, we're strongly committed to the goal of ending today's spam epidemic."

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